

OUTSMARTING ONLINE CHILD PREDATORS

by Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott

EVERY DAY, LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS around the state who specialize in cyber crimes investigations work tirelessly to identify and locate potential child sex predators who troll Internet chat rooms for underage victims. Since its launch in 2003, the Office of the Attorney General's Cyber Crimes Unit has arrested 150 suspects who used the Internet to prey upon children – and we often do so by pairing up with local and federal law enforcement officers.

In a series of undercover sting operations during the month of June, for example, our Cyber Crimes officers teamed with officers in the Round Rock Police Department and the FBI to identify, locate and arrest eight suspected child predators in Williamson and northern Travis counties. All eight suspects were charged with online solicitation of a minor, a felony punishable by at least two years in prison.

During the undercover operation, Cyber Crimes Unit officers identified and arrested three suspected online predators who placed or responded to online advertisements seeking sexual encounters with children. In one case, investigators determined that Emmanuel Alejandro Gonzalez, 27, had posted an online advertisement seeking sexual activity. When someone he thought was a 15-year-old girl responded to the advertisement, Gonzalez conducted sexually graphic online chats with her and arranged to meet her in Round Rock.

The “girl” was actually an undercover Cyber Crimes Unit investigator. Cyber Crimes Unit officers identified and arrested Gonzalez, transporting him to the Round Rock Police Department.

Cyber Crimes Unit officers also arrested five suspects who initiated online chats on social networking sites to sexually proposition children. One of the suspects arrested was Noel Santos Torres, a 31-year-old restaurant chain manager. According to investigators, Torres initiated online chats and exchanged sexually graphic text messages with someone he thought was a 15-year-old girl. The “girl” was actually an undercover Cyber Crimes Unit officer. Torres sexually propositioned the girl and arranged to meet her on June 12 at a location in Round Rock. Cyber Crimes Unit officers identified and arrested Torres when he arrived at the meeting.

We are grateful to the local, state and federal law enforcement officials from Central Texas who helped make these eight arrests possible and continue to work with the Cyber Crimes Unit to protect Texas families. The results of our undercover summer sweep demonstrate that collaboration between state and federal authorities and police and sheriff's departments statewide offers the best pathway to success.

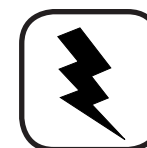
Another key to our unified approach to encouraging cyber safety and protecting

children online is parental involvement. Cyber predators pose a constant and very real threat to young Texans' safety and well-being, so Texas parents must remain vigilant to their children's online activity. Specifically, parents must remind their children and teenagers about the potentially dangerous criminals hiding behind seemingly benign online profiles or online advertisements.

Since criminals use today's technology to be more creative in their illegal pursuits, parents should also establish boundaries for children's mobile phone usage. Our Cyber Crimes Unit officers have arrested several sexual predators – including some of those taken into custody during our summer sweep – who used wireless devices in an attempt to call or text children. These communications often include sexually explicit language or images intended to lure children into a sexual encounter. Wireless devices that allow users to surf the Internet may also give children an opportunity to go online and access sexually explicit content, chat rooms and social networking sites without a parent's knowledge.

Texas families seeking more information about cyber safety should access the Attorney General's website at www.texasattorneygeneral.gov, which includes publications, videos and tips from cyber investigators on making the Internet a safe and valuable tool for families. – August 2013

POINTS TO REMEMBER



CYBER SAFETY TIPS

Parents can establish safe online environments for children and teens by setting the following boundaries:

Internet access - Place the computer in a public room at home. Do not permit children or teens to use Web cameras. Make sure children know never to agree to a face-to-face meeting with someone they meet online and never to divulge personal information to an Internet stranger. Establish ground rules, including the hours children and teens may be online and the kinds of websites they may visit.

Wireless devices- Teach children and teens to avoid calling or texting people they don't already know. Save any inappropriate images or texts a child or teen receives and provide them to law enforcement officials. Use the wireless service provider's parental controls to monitor and manage children's cell phone use.

For more information about cyber safety and the Texas Attorney General's Cyber Crimes Unit, visit www.texasattorneygeneral.gov.

Call (800) 252-8014 or visit the Attorney General's website at www.texasattorneygeneral.gov to find out more.



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT